

NORBURG, A.



# THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

1230 YORK AVENUE

NEW YORK, NY 10021

March 21, 1980

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

Dr. Arthur Norburg  
Ethics and Values in Science and Technology  
Office of Science and Society  
National Science Foundation  
Washington, D. C. 20550

Dear Dr. Norburg:

It is my privilege to write in support of Dr. William W. Lowrance's application for an EVIST Sustained Development Award.

My first correspondence with Bill was during the drafting of his book on risk; and I have followed his career ever since as one of the most promising minds endeavoring to make some sense of the science-ethics-policy interfaces. I was looking forward to an even closer working relationship with him when Stanford was negotiating his move there, but that was deflected by my own moving to New York just as he came to Stanford.

It is in many conversations that the activity and consistency of his mind impressed me. His skills are also evident in his book, but written for a lay audience it just begins to display their depth and subtlety. He has relatively few publications, though he has already had a career rich in policy and teaching responsibility; and I feel he badly needs a frame for reflection, analysis and the writing needed for him to develop his professional reputation.

Speaking personally, when I came to the Rockefeller I missed the breadth of interdisciplinary perspectives with which I associated daily at Stanford -- though no one there quite matched what Bill himself brought there. The city, beyond our walks, has much to offer in compensation; but there are still perils of scientistic parochialism -- perhaps especially in an institution with the high reputation in our specialty that the Rockefeller has enjoyed for many years. (You should peruse the enclosed brochure to see how specialized it is!)

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We take the motto "pro bono humani generis" very seriously, and have no doubt that the work in the laboratory and clinics amply fulfill it. But the problematics of "pro bono" remain unanalyzed -- to a degree that have me unsatisfied whether, by our own standards, we are doing the best possible. (The "we" here is all of academic science). In conversations with many people I pointed to Bill as a prototype of the kind of person we might seek. That he might come here himself was beyond my expectations.

Lo and behold, circumstances did make him available; and I was not about to let the chance go by, even though I had just begun to collect the funding that could provide more durable security for his position. On my own responsibility, I counted on the likelihood that his unique qualities would be as apparent to others as to myself: and I am confident they will be.

With few publications now, and the venturesomeness of going beyond the traditional disciplinary bases, Bill does not fit the customary academic ladder. Fortunately, this institution is encumbered with little of the rigidity that hinders even sober experimentation elsewhere; and I believe we can offer Bill a milieu in which he can mature his skills, insight, and visible product, and be a valued member of our community as well. (For the latter, at least, it is invaluable that he is an alumnus with a respected accomplishment in his laboratory science). I am hoping that his program can become a durable feature of campus life, but the precise staffing and organizational form must await an assessment of this experiment.

This institution has a few committed amateurs in "EVIST" (including myself and Rod Nichols) who will be in close, critical connection with Bill. We are also all eager to foster connections with the many other institutions in N.Y. City, and already have some record therein. So I think Bill will not lack for a critical milieu, nor for problems to tackle.

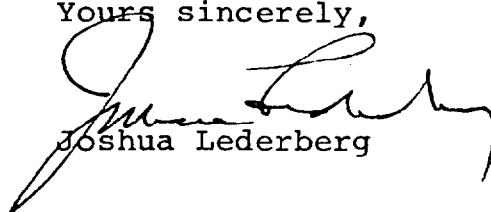
Bill's effort at definition of responsibility in science is an ambitious one -- and I have tried my own hand at that -- but what he has already organized bids fair to make it a definitive contribution. Coming from one with an insider's experience and outlook it will be that much more incisive and credible to the community itself.

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Having taken many steps on behalf of his career for William Lowrance it is almost superfluous that I register my utmost regard for his talent -- and for his courage.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Joshua Lederberg', with a stylized, flowing script. The signature is positioned above the printed name 'Joshua Lederberg'.

Encl.

bcc: RWN  
RSY